Heading for leadership: Metaphors from Pakistani and Kashmiri teachers

Imran Mogra, Birmingham City University

Introduction

Those entering the teaching profession transform their identity as they meander through the ebb and flow of their respective teacher education courses. How teachers imagine their future and their sense of self, in and through their course and career, is significant in understanding their conceptions, commitments and aspirations. During their course, some students from BAME communities are troubled by experiences of discrimination, whilst others flourish (Mogra, forthcoming). Thus, the setting of their course plays a fundamental role in helping them see beyond the confines of their qualification and the Early Career Teacher's (ECT) job and shape them as teachers and leaders. Research on educational leadership side-lines certain epistemological and ontological positions such as race, culture, and belief. The beliefs and values of leaders influence the ethos and visions of institutions as well as their personalities and conduct. Accordingly, their articulation of their belief and conception regarding leadership is important. This article is part of research undertaken to explore the leadership and course experiences of Pakistani and Kashmiri student teachers. It focuses on the meaning they attach to leadership and the metaphors they employ for understanding and explaining the role of leaders.

Research method

This research offers insights from 29 BA and PGCE teachers who self-defined as being of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritage in a university in England. A questionnaire-based survey method offered several benefits. Open-ended questions were deployed to invite honest and personal comments (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

Participants were guaranteed anonymity, as such, pseudonyms reflecting their religious and cultural backgrounds are used. The research emphasised the opt-in nature of participating and informed consent was sought. The participant research information and consent form were provided. The research respected their autonomy and dignity (BERA, 2018).

Leadership theories

There are several successful leadership models and practices associated with successful schools. A review by Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2020) drew upon two main models of successful leadership: transformational and pedagogical/instructional. Transformational leadership is most often

associated with vision; setting directions; restructuring and realigning the organisation; developing staff and curriculum; and involvement with the external community. They note, following Marks and Printy (2003), that these leaders motivate their followers by raising their consciousness about the importance of organisational goals and by inspiring them to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organisation.

The pedagogical leadership emphasises the importance of establishing clear educational goals, planning the curriculum and evaluating teachers and teaching. In this model leaders emphasise the importance of teaching and learning and enhancing their quality (Day, Sammons, and Gorgen 2020). The involvement in the core business of teaching and learning is essential for educational leaders if they are to achieve positive outcomes for their students (Robinson, Hohepa, and Lloyd, 2009). The distributed leadership is not a 'model' in itself, but rather represents both a concept and set of practices that lie implicitly within the successful application of both the transformational and instructional models of leadership (Day, Sammons, and Gorgen, 2020). The idea of distributed leadership has its origins in cognitive and social psychology, drawing particularly upon distributed cognition and activity theory.

With these summaries, Day, Sammons, and Gorgen (2020:25) emphasise that the reviews of international evidence show the work of school leaders as a critical determinant in the quality of the psychological, physical and social environments and conditions in which teaching and learning take place.

The underrepresentation of BAME teachers in leadership positions is a national issue. It appears more acute at the highest level (Mogra, forthcoming). National data reveals that in state funded schools in England, 92.5% of headteachers are white British and out of 67,576 teachers in formal leadership positions (AHT, DHT, and HT), 2.35% (1587) were leaders from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani groups (DfE 2023).

Conceptions of leadership

A section of the research explored their definition and understanding of leadership. In total 29 responses were received. There was a recognition that leadership was a complex phenomenon with divergent meanings. A group thought of it in what could be classed as transactional terms. For them, it was about being able to "give guidance" and "knowledge" and "influencing individuals". In this category, leadership was also considered to be about "decisions", and "leading a group of people or

an organisation". In essence, according to this interpretation, leadership means taking responsibility to lead and direct.

However, others conceived leadership as distributed. These participants felt that it was about "taking ownership of something" and leaders were the "superiors [who are] involved as frontline workers not just as delegators". Other traits included:

> A leader leads a group of people but also takes everyone's opinions/weaknesses into consideration. (Habibah, female, UG).

> Leadership is the ability to take charge in situations in order to support others whilst also having the ability to request and make use of the ideas and thoughts of the people you are essentially leading. (Hassan, male, UG)

In other words, this group expects leaders to be involved in some of the work that those being led do rather than remaining aloof from the lower strata of the leadership hierarchy. This implies that leaders should have a close relationship by listening and learning at the same time.

A second perspective is considered in terms of being a role model. To this group, leadership also means "setting an example of how to take the next steps and outlining what is best practice and giving advice and support" (Bilal, male, PG).

At least three understood it beyond the confines of a position where a leader exerts influence (Northouse, 2016). For this group, leadership means exerting social influence on effecting change towards a common goal to improve circumstances or situations. It was defined by Maymunah and Khawlah as "being accountable for good outcomes as well as for mistakes". According to Amra, it was a "process of guiding teachers, children and parents towards common educational goals".

Finally, it was also appreciated as servant leadership where empathy and the development of individuals existed and was not confined to the setting of goals (Spears, 2010; Blanchard and Broadwell, 2018). Asma felt that it was about "taking charge and showing confidence in taking charge". However, for Juwayriyah, this was to be executed without being "condescending, controlling, [and by taking] the groups' views into account, being calm and collected". Moreover, Sawdah compounded this perspective by adding that "leadership is when an individual listens to and

takes into account the feedback of other individuals and is able to regulate situations and as well as enable individuals to become the best of themselves".

The above findings show a sophisticated conceptualisation of leadership. Whilst the study was not concerned with uncovering the epistemological basis of these conceptions, the elucidation of leadership in terms of servitude appears to portray a religious dimension. For example, servant leadership may well have been informed by a well-known Islamic tradition: 'The leader of a people is their servant'. Historically, servant leadership is exemplified in the workings of Jesus, Guru Nanak, Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ). This suggests that there is a need to overcome ethnocentrisms and for reconceptualising educational leadership. Shah (2006) has argued that this is to be realised in ways relevant to the experiences of diverse ethnic groups, students and communities. The reception of educational leadership by learners from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds interacts with their learning experience and performance. Therefore, to her, any analysis of perceptions of leadership in a particular society needs to be understood and debated in context.

Background

Another section of the inquiry asked them to present a metaphor for leadership. Metaphors may convey an apparent simplicity in their formation. However, they can signal the potential modus operandi of how these future leaders intend to lead their settings or prefer to be led by leaders. That said, most conceptions at this initial phase would be considered malleable subject to modifications through education, experience, policy and context. Metaphors such as teacher as researcher and teacher as professional are some of the common descriptions of teachers' work (Kumashiro, 2004).

Race, religion and culture play a part in producing metaphors to portray teachers and their work. A complex web of interconnected discourses such as historical, social, political, economic and generational come into play to influence the discourse of the teacher. This is especially the case when deconstructing the metaphoric meaning of the "Black Teacher" (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown, 2018:285). The significance of understanding all teachers, but especially Black teachers through metaphors helps to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of conceptualizing the Black teacher. It also helps to capture the long-term historical work and conceptualization of the Black teacher over time. After discussing the theoretical underpinnings of their use of metaphor to describe the work of Black teachers, (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown, 2018:285) discuss four metaphors about Black teachers: *Black teacher as a commodity*, *Black teacher as silver bullet*, *Black teacher as role model* and *Black teacher as kin.* They draw attention to the limitations and possibilities of using metaphors

within the literature of Black teachers and suggest that teacher education programs draw on metaphors for preservice teachers to consider the context of inequity, the possibilities for transformation and to properly conceptualize what culturally relevant and social-justice based teaching could look like (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown 2018:296).

Metaphors are also akin to sense-making where they refer to how people structure the unknown to be able to act upon it (Schechter, Shaked, Ganon-Shilon, and Goldratt, 2018). In addition, Schechter, et al., (2018:4) note that "metaphors are a dominant component of figurative language. They reflect cognitive processes through which humans encounter the world, perceive reality, and envision change (Witherspoon & Crawford, 2014). They are mental constructs, which reflect how human beings experience and shape their reasoning (Gunbayi, 2011)." Moreover, metaphors offer colourful descriptions about teachers and teaching (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown, 2018).

Johnson (2017) notes metaphors for headteachers such as parent, ringmaster, architect, and juggler. In her study, five overarching metaphors synthesize the BAME head teachers' leadership perspectives: parent; ambassador; moral steward; role model; and advocate (Johnson, 2017). Some semblances with these were revealed in the current research. However, this study brought to the fore others such as "bulldozer", "lion as it is fierce", "storyteller", "firefighter", "cheerleader", "egg in a cake" and "captain". The metaphor of leaders as carers appears absent, most likely due to the small sample size, as one tends to intimate the kind of relationship teachers have with their schools, pupils and curriculum subjects.

Leadership through metaphor

Participants were invited to present a metaphor to characterise leadership. The use of metaphors helps teachers think about identities as leaders and dispositions of leaders. All student teachers tendered one. Overall, they reflected a wide variety. However, Ruqayyah, (UG), was unsure about what the question meant. Hence it is important to define and explain these before engaging students with such kind of work.

To give a sense of the enormity of the responsibility of school leaders, Mulayka, a female, made a connection with political leaders. "I would use a picture of the leaders around the world because it is an excellent way of presenting what leadership may look like and the responsibilities that come with it". Similarly, Sawdah, drawing on the metaphor of a prime minister hinted at the restricted power and the need to have common interests when executing democratic leadership role.

Leadership is being in charge but also looking at the positives and negatives of things. For example, a prime minister of a country is a leader, but they cannot do whatever they feel like. They will have to look at the positive and negative a certain situation might have on their country.

To illustrate the hierarchical social constitution of schools, recourse is often made to geometric figures and abstract ideas. For example, Habibah explained:

A school is a triangle - the headteacher is at the top, the teachers in the middle and the children at the bottom.

Some participants referenced metaphors to speak about leadership as an attempt to allude to the reality of how schools and society operate. The proposition seems to highlight indirect criticism of characteristics such as being ruthless by ignoring the views of others and pursuing self-interests.

A bulldozer because I understand the roles and responsibilities of leadership. I am aware of the salary they receive but front liners are the ones who turn the dream into reality and get paid less than the delegators (Zaynab, PG).

In contrast, a few focussed on the themes of encouragement by referencing narrators and cheerleaders.

The storyteller. Leadership is all about the why and how! Being able to share experiences and guiding. Stories do that, they tell you a story and explain why things happen, how they happen and what solved the problem.

The leader is the cheerleader - tries to get most of the people he/she leads, and is positive and upbeat... .

Be that as it may, at this stage, they may not fully grasp the socio-political narrative of education and, therefore, it is important that, unlike the apparent cheerfulness of the cheerleaders they critically understand the demands placed on leaders and all teachers. Nevertheless, the metaphor of

a cheerleader represents the idea that leaders ought to raise the tempo and positivity of their staff to maximise the benefits from teachers for the benefit of communities.

Metaphors can be enveloped within a variety of discourses and practices (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown 2018). A few participants seemed to be concerned about workload and the regular policy initiatives, challenges and increasing managerial demands placed upon schools. This is perhaps captured in the image of the flames and the objects of a juggler.

> A chief firefighter. He has to lead and equip his team with all the relevant skills and knowledge to battle against different situations on a daily basis (Bilal, PG).

> One size does not fit all. Hence, adequate training, consultation and feedback should be made available. Furthermore, managers and any other personnel involved in introducing change should anticipate conflict or change and take remedial approaches where communication and relationships may falter. The idea must be to remain equipped to douse a fire rather than be reactive – 'Be preventive rather than reactive' (Hanzalah, PG).

> The Juggler. This is a leadership metaphor that I think most leaders would relate to because they have many things to do with their day and have many hats to wear (Amra, PG).

Nevertheless, in such a landscape, a sense of community and the fundamental role that leaders can play in creating cohesion was echoed in at least two metaphors from Fatimah and Nusaybah respectively.

> Leadership is like an egg on a cake. You need the egg to have a complete cake without it the cake will fall apart.

> Somebody who maximises the efforts of those working for them and brings people together to achieve a common goal or purpose.

The most common image constructed in this sample is linked to cultural phenomena. The metaphor of the school leader was likened to a captain suggesting that leaders should have a clear purpose and knowledge of their team. This exemplifies that metaphors are enveloped within a variety of historically specific interests, ideas, discourses and practices (Brown, Dilworth, and Brown, 2018).

Leadership is the captain of your football team motivating the rest of the team to play their best to win the game (Hassan, male, BA).

A captain on a ship, ensuring everything is running smoothly. This is because a captain has the most experience and can give advice or make changes to support people (Atiqa, female, BA).

A captain: someone who is in charge of a group (Jumanah, female, BA).

A distinct leadership explanation emerged from Maryam (PG), who untangled ideas of gender disparity within primary leadership, writing: "Allowing a woman to be independent and in charge of their own life".

Conclusion

This article analysed conceptions and metaphors from a group of recently qualified teachers of Pakistani and Kashmiri heritages. The findings reveal a sophisticated understanding of leadership, its role, opportunities, and challenges. In terms of leadership models, their depictions were found to relate to distributed, role model, influence and servant leadership models.

It also uncovered some metaphors as they imagined their future roles and responsibilities. They fortified some metaphors common among teachers and highlighted political leaders, bulldozer, triangle, storyteller, egg in a cake and captain. These have been used for different purposes including to validate and indirectly criticise educational policy, praxis and discourse.

Implications

These findings suggest that ITE programs should enhance students' conceptions and understandings of leadership and its models in primary school and engage them in the creation of metaphors:

- to raise aspirations for school leadership
- to foster professional identities
- to challenge cultural bias inadvertently transferred through metaphors
- to engender transformation in the conception and role of teachers and leaders
- to reflect on the moral purpose of their role
- to explore the pedagogy of using metaphors

Reference

Blanchard, K., and Broadwell, R. (Eds.) (2018) *Servant Leadership In Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results*. Polvera Publishing: Oakland, CA.

British Educational Research Association. 2018. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. BERA: London. 4th edition.

Brown, A.L., Dilworth, M.E., and Brown, K.D. (2018) Understanding the Black Teacher Through Metaphor, *Urban Rev*, 50, pp.284-299.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research Methods in Education*. London: Routledge. Eight edition.

Day, C., Sammons, P., and Gorgen, K. (2020) *Successful School Leadership*. Reading: Education Development Trust. [Online]

https://www.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/EducationDevelopmentTrust/files/ce/ce5195c9-e647-4efc-b43b-f6ddd0bacca4.pdf (accessed 22/12/2021).

DfE (Department for Education) (2023) *School teacher workforce*.

Gunbayi, I. (2011) Principals' perceptions on school management: A case study with metaphorical analysis, *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences*, 3, (2), pp.541-561.

Johnson, L. (2017) The lives and identities of UK Black and South Asian head teachers: Metaphors of leadership, *Educational Management, Administration, & Leadership*, 45, (5), pp.842-862.

Kumashiro, K. (2004) *Against common sense: Teaching and learning toward social justice*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Marks, H. and Printy, S. (2003) Principal leadership and school performance: An integration of transformational and instructional leadership, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39, (3), pp.370-397.

Mogra, I. (forthcoming) From teacher training to school leadership, in *Ethnicity, Religion and Education in the UK*. Edited by Iqbal, K and Abbas, T. Abingdon: Routledge.

Northouse, P. G. (2016) *Leadership: Theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Seventh edition.

Robinson, V., Hohepa, M. and Lloyd, C. (2009) School leadership and student outcomes: Identifying what works and why. Best Evidence Syntheses Iteration (BES), New Zealand: Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/60180/BES-Leadership-Web-updated-foreword-2015.pdf [accessed 22/12/2021]

Schechter, C., Shaked, H., Ganon-Shilon, S., and Goldratt, M. (2018) Leadership Metaphors: School Principals' Sense-Making of a National Reform, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 17, (1), pp.1-26.

Shah., S. (2006) Leading Multiethnic Schools: A New Understanding of Muslim Youth Identity, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 34, (2), pp.215-237.

Spears, L. C. (2010) 'Character and Servant Leadership: Ten Characteristics of Effective, Caring Leaders', *The Journal of Virtues & Leadership*, 1, (1), pp.25-30.

Witherspoon N. A., and Crawford, E. (2014) Metaphors of leadership and spatialized practice, *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 17, (3), pp.257-285.